Young and Radical in Postwar Japan

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This project examines the global connections, and disconnections, that fostered a globally mobile class of young Japanese radicals during the last four decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to understand how an influential minority of young working-class Japanese who experienced unprecedented high standards of living, educational attainment, and leisure time and yet nevertheless elected to fire a gun, throw a grenade, or gas a subway in advocacy for a religious or political movement. Importantly, there is a larger social question at work here in that despite clear global convergences of modernity, youth, and radical politics scholars have yet to construct a historically informed interpretive framework for discussing this transnational and perhaps trans-epochal phenomenon. Not all political violence is born of religious fervor, and not all young radicals are of Middle Eastern descent. The highly industrialized societies of Europe, the Americas and Pacific Asia have generated a significant share of the world's angry youth whether they be Islamic extremists, Communist revolutionaries or Neo-Fascist thugs. By looking at Japan there is the potential to better understand the globality of youth radicalism in a historical context that moves beyond the contemporary obsession with Islamic fundamentalism.

Many Europeans and Americans, and most Japanese for that matter, naïvely think of the Japanese after 1945 as politically passive and unlikely to become directly involved in radical politics. Yet the late twentieth century is demarcated by significant points when normal, everyday Japanese people individually and collectively took direct, radical political action – from the 17-year old who assassinated the president of the Japan Socialist Party in 1960 to the 18 million youth who took to the streets, occupied their schools and universities, and besieged parliament to demonstrate their opposition to Japan's involvement in the Vietnam War in 1968. Indeed, small bands of dedicated young radicals have pushed and prodded the Japanese state since the 1850s. From the assassinations committed by the Isshin-shishi ('Men of High Purpose') of the 1850s and 1860s to the young fascists who launched a string of unsuccessful coup d'états during the 1930s to the hijackings and airport attacks by leftist terror groups during the 1970s and 1980s, the apparent political status quo of contemporary Japan is in no small way the result of a century and a half of sporadic eruptions of political violence perpetrated by young Japanese men and women.

While it is unfortunate that non-specialists often overlook the growing base of studies of popular

political opposition in modern Japan, more important is that scholars of modern Japan have still paid insufficient attention to the impact of gender, generation and class differentiations in the ways that extremist politics also shaped the political contours of twentieth century Japan. This history of radical youth politics in postwar Japan enables a better understanding of radicalized youth within the context of the global idea flows that precipitated a peculiar confluence of Mao-ism, black nationalism and Palestinian liberation in young leftists' re-interpretations of Marx-Leninism in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the neo-Fascist iconographies, and political associations, of mobsters and motorcycle youth gangs of the 1980s; and the trans-national religious mélange at the center of terror attacks perpetrated by the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult in the mid-1990s.

Politicians and bureaucrats navigated their shared interest in the social welfare of young people alongside their fear that young people also constituted a serious threat to social stability. From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the Japanese state responded to youth radicalism with measured amounts of co-option and repression, but the constitutional democracy from the mid-twentieth century limited the extent to which the state could deploy its customary toolbox of suppressive tactics while simultaneously imbuing young people with specific inalienable rights. No longer children, but not yet fully emancipated adults, young people in postwar Japan learned to express their subjectivity during an intense period of successive cultural movements and political crises that ran parallel to the experiences of young people in the highly-industrialized nations of Western Europe and the Americas.

The Japanese state responded to its 'youth problem' with formal and informal modes of suppression that included selective intimidation and even the recruitment of underworld groups with strong ties to right-wing parties who, with American backing, enthusiastically allied with a select group of neo-nationalists and neo-fascists, as they 'struck back' at 'Communist insurgencies' first thought born in the Soviet Union, then believed to be fomented by the People's Republic of China, and finally thought to be controlled by North Korea. Their success at knocking out leftist youth groups in Japan, and corresponding indirect encouragement of neo-nationalist agendas, was such that by the end of the 1990s most Japanese had come to believe that youth radicalism was a thing of the past.

In recovering the narrative of radical politics in which Japanese youth participated this book examines the political discourses produced by and for young blue-collar men and women – from the weekly rants found in the sports, gambling, pornography and politics magazine *Shūkan Taishū* (*Weekly Masses*) to the political subject embedded within the comic book series *Kyōtei Shōjo* (*Motor-boat Racer Girl*). Analyzed alongside diplomatic, police and intelligence reports collected from the national archives of Japan, Great Britain and the United States as well as ephemera gleaned from the archives of the Takazawa Collection at the University of Hawai'i in Manoa and the Ōhara Institute for

Social Research at Hōsei University in Tokyo, these sources offer a unique means of moving beyond methodological nationalism by investigating Japan as a conjunction point for the global flow of ideas and peoples that shaped the Cold War world, and defined the late twentieth century.

By focusing specifically on young radicals of blue-collar origins, this book breaks from conventional studies of Japanese youth and political violence that have tended to blame the *ennui* of affluence for several waves of youth radicalism since 1960. High-profile acts of political violence committed by young Japanese of blue-collar origins illustrate that social alienation in a highly industrialized society, such as Japan, is born of a complex interchange of material, social, political and psychological conditions. This book argues that the severity and social impact of these acts of political violence also had the inadvertent effect of lending credibility to further levels of social and legal repression that did not redress the extent to which some young people were push/pulled to acts of religio-political extremism, but instead precipitated further levels of social alienation that enhanced the attraction of violence. This book concludes by examining the extent to which severely diminished employment, educational, and training opportunities for youth aged 16 to 24 has since the 1990s combined with intensified levels of social repression of 'odd youth' to trigger high rates of atomized (non-collective) anti-social behaviors informed by video games, animated films, and comic book series with extreme political themes. Indeed, the Japanese state's successful suppression of heterodoxic religious and political movements helped to foster an involution of violence that manifested in a subset of youth who expressed their anger inward as violence against themselves, their family, or their classmates.[1]

Studies of youth and youth politics in modern Japan, and global youth politics from the 1960s to the 1980s generally, overlook the extent to which young blue-collar men and women participated in radical political movements, right- and left-wing, all through the postwar era.[2] Many politicians and

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1 Vogel, S.H., Vogel, S.K., 2013. *The Japanese family in transition: from the professional housewife ideal to the dilemmas of choice*. Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD.; and Krieg, A., Dickie, J.R., 2013. Attachment and hikikomori: a psychosocial developmental model. Int J Soc Psychiatry 59, 61–72. doi:10.1177/0020764011423182.

2 Massey, J.A., 1975. *Youth and politics in Japan*. Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass.; Ambaras, D.R., 2006. *Bad youth: juvenile delinquency and the politics of everyday life in modern Japan*. University of California Press, Berkeley.; Avenell, S.A., 2010. *Making Japanese citizens civil society and the mythology of the Shimin in postwar Japan.* University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif.; London.; Yoder, R.S., 2004. *Youth deviance in Japan: class reproduction and non-conformity*. Trans Pacific, Melbourne, Vic.; Cassegård, C., 2013. *Youth movements, trauma and alternative space in contemporary Japan*. Leiden:Global Oriental, 2014. ; Marotti, W.A., 2013. *Money, trains, and guillotines: art and revolution in 1960s Japan*. Duke University Press, Durham and London., 小熊英二, 渦岡謙一, 高橋直樹, 2009. *1968*. 新曜社, 東京, Oguma, E., 2015. Japan's 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil; Ross, K., 2002. *May '68 and its afterlives*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.; Kurlansky, M., 2004. *1968: the year that rocked the world*. Ballantine, New York.; Berger, D., 2010. *The hidden 1970s histories of radicalism*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J.; Gildea, R., Mark, J., Warring, A., 2013. *Europe's 1968 voices of revolt*. Oxford University Press.

pundits assert that radical youth politics in Japan died-out during the 1980s, but their assertions belie the extent to which right-wing hate groups and fringe religio-political movements continued to attract young people well into the 1990s.[3] Recent studies of Japan after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami investigate a rise in youth activism in apparent opposition to the rightward turn of the Japanese state within the context of decreasing social and economic opportunity.[4] Other recent scholarship suggests that the scarcity of work and educational opportunities since the end of the 1990s has created a generationally stratified precariat comprised of the first Japanese since 1945 to face the prospects of a lifetime of diminishing opportunity and economic disadvantage.[5] Neither recent trend in youth studies looks closely at the ways in which class and gender have impacted the choice by different age cohorts to join radical groups and or engage in political violence.

3 Metraux, D.A., 1999. *Aum Shinrikyo and Japanese youth.* University Press of America, Lanham, Md.; Reader, I., 2000. *Religious violence in contemporary Japan the case of Aum Shinrikyo*. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

4 Slater, D.H., Keiko, N., Kindstrand, L., 2012. Social Media, Information and Political Activism in Japan's 3.11 Crisis.

5 David Slater, S.U. and P.W.G., 2011. Re-Narrating Social Class and Masculinity in Neoliberal Japan: An examination of the media coverage of the "Akihabara Incident" of 2008 http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2011/SlaterGalbraith.html (accessed 12.30.15). ; and Allison, A., 2013. *Precarious Japan.* Duke University Press, Durham.